

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JOHANNESBURG 2304

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, SF, UK
SUBJECT: OWEN MEETING WITH S.A. TRADE UNIONISTS

1. SUMMARY: THE CITIZEN SCOOPED OTHER SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPERS BY REPORTING IN A TYPICALLY TENDENTIOUS AND INACCURATE FASHION ON A CONFIDENTIAL MEETING BETWEEN BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN AND A GROUP OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISTS AND INDUSTRIALISTS. DESPITE THE CITIZEN'S ASSERTIONS, THE BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS DID NOT ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH AN EXHORTATION BY WHITE LABOR LEADERS THAT BRITAIN NOT INTERFERE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LABOR RELATIONS, ACCORDING TO ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS. OWEN SAID THAT THE CHOICE FACING THE UNITED KINGDOM IS EITHER TO TIGHTEN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS CODE OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES OR RESORT TO BOYCOTTS DUE TO PRESSURE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. END SUMMARY.

2. WHAT WAS TO HAVE BEEN A CONFIDENTIAL MEETING BETWEEN BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID OWEN AND A GROUP OF BLACK AND WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISTS AND INDUSTRIALISTS, WAS REPORTED CONFIDENTIAL

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ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY THE CITIZEN UNDER THE HEADLINE "DON'T MEDDLE OWEN TOLD". ACCORDING TO JANE HLONGWANE, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE (BLACK) ENGINEERING AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION, WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE MEETING, THIS TENDENTIOUS HEADLINE WAS TYPICALLY (FOR THE CITIZEN) MISLEADING AND PARTS OF THE STORY WERE INACCURATE. THE BLACK TRADE UNIONISTS, WHO ALSO INCLUDED LUCY MVUBELO OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF CLOTHING

WORKERS AND CLEMENT MONTSHO, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TRANSPORT AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION, DID NOT ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH STATEMENTS BY ARTHUR GROBBELAAR, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TRADE UNION COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA, AND BEN NICHOLSON OF THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION THAT "BRITAIN SHOULD NOT INHERFERE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LABOR RELATIONS, BUT THAT FRIENDLY ADVICE WOULD BE WELCOME."

3. ACCORDING TO HLONGWANE, THE CITIZEN ARTICLE ALSO STATES INCORRECTLY THAT DO. OWEN LAID GREAT STRESS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WIEHAHN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO LABOR LEGISLATION. SHE SAID GROBBELAAR, WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION, EXPLAINED WHAT IT WAS ABOUT AND SUGGESTED TO OWEN THAT MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES SHOULD MAKE REPRESENTATIONS TO THE COMMISSION. OWEN REPLIED, ACCORDING TO HLONGWANE, THAT HE WOULD LOOK INTO THIS SUGGESTION.

4. MONTSHO IS REPORTED BY HLONGWANE TO HAVE COMPLAINED THAT A LARGE BRITISH SUBSIDIARY WOULD NOT ALLOW ITS BLACK WORKERS TO SET UP A UNION IN APPARENT VIOLATION OF THE BRITISH CODE OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES. OWEN REPLIED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS LOOKING INTO TIGHTENING UP THE MONITORING OF THE UK CODE. HE ADDED, ACCORDING TO HLONGWANE, THAT THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN A WORKABLE CODE OF CONDUCT WHICH WILL CONTRIBUTE TOWARD THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION OR RESORT TO BOYCOTTS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE WHICH COULD ALSO HARM THE UNITED KINGDOM.
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